

## FULL COUNCIL – 8 JULY 2024 – QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 22

### First Questions

#### Question 1

**From Cllr Jack Davies to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness, Cllr Steve Davies**

The Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment to allow local authorities to opt out of right to buy was a popular policy with local people. Will the Portfolio Holder write to the new Secretary of State and ask for right to buy to be stopped in the New Forest?

*Answer:*

*As my fellow members will know this administration wholeheartedly supports creating a variety of opportunities for those of our residents who aspire to own their own homes, but need a small helping hand to do so.*

*Our housing development programme has so far delivered 7 homes for Shared Ownership, with 8 more in the pipeline, whilst up to 30 First Homes are in the approved development pipeline across our Strategic Sites. The Right to Buy has supported 69 New Forest residents in the last 3 and a half years, whilst the capital receipts from these sales, plus grant funding, has been re-invested by the Council to 62 social housing properties of the size, and in the areas, our applicants need them most.*

*This year we also plan to invest up to £18 million in delivering additional affordable housing and the last Corporate Plan 2024-28 continues this administration's significant commitment to developing more affordable housing, in all its forms across the district.*

*In my opinion, if a tenant can take on the commitment to own their own their own home. It is a fundamental belief they should be able to succeed. Therefore, the simple answer, is no.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding the loss of housing stock in the district through Right to Buy, and the current number of homes owned by the District Council, the Portfolio Holder reported that there were just over 5,200 with development continuing over the next three years. He reported that he would find out the exact number and pass this information on.*

#### Question 2

**From Cllr Malcolm Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Cllr Dan Poole**

Dibden Golf Club is celebrating its 50-year anniversary this year. Why is New Forest District Council not celebrating the opening of this facility, which it provided nor working with the club and members to help them celebrate this event?

*Answer:*

*As Cllr Wade is aware, the District Council in its entirety is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday this year, and this will be central to our theme for the upcoming New Forest Show. Whilst it is impossible for us to hold an individual recognition event for every asset or facility in the celebrations, I am very pleased to let the councillor know I am attending the golf centre on Friday morning this week to visit and try out the new golf simulator facility very recently*

*installed, and opened as a result of the successful partnership we have with MyTime Active. I would of course welcome the opportunity to attend a further celebration if invited by the club.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question suggesting the Portfolio Holder engage with club members to help them celebrate, the Portfolio Holder reported that he would be happy to have a conversation with the golf club when he attended on Friday, about any celebrations they might wish to have.*

### **Question 3**

#### **From Cllr Mark Clark to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate, Cllr Jeremy Heron**

With the new Government firmly in place, can the Portfolio Holder indicate whether work has been undertaken by officers to provide enough material to maximise the local government settlement with this authority given the manifesto commitments?

*Answer:*

*The new government has been firmly in place for nearly half a week, so I guess it is a very reasonable question to ask.*

*The Leader very recently sent a letter to Michael Gove, the then Minister for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities outlining a request for a multi-year settlement, as well as highlighting our concerns at the size and severity of savings being required by the County Council. It was confirmed in the reply, and I quote;*

*‘Your letter raises the importance of multi-year certainty, which this Government recognises. Spending decisions beyond 2024/25 are a matter for the next spending review. It is the Government’s intention to return to multi-year settlements in the next parliament when circumstances allow’.*

*Regardless of whether this comes into effect from next year or not, this administration will then do what it always does. We will prioritise our spend according to the needs of our residents, and take the bold decisions needed to protect our vital frontline services, and protect the long-term financial health of this authority.*

*Note – in the absence of Cllr Heron, this question was dealt with in writing.*

### **Question 4**

#### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Cllr Geoffrey Blunden**

Is it not unreasonable for Parish and Town Councils to suddenly have to find an extra approx. £30k for tree works provision, because NFDC deems it reasonable to raise its tree contracting prices significantly, especially following councils setting their budget for FY24/25 in January at the explicit request of NFDC?

*Answer:*

*Thank you for your question. We have been engaging with Parish and Town Councils since July last year on the fact that we were retendering our tree works contract, alongside Test*

*Valley District Council. It was clear from all of those who engaged positively in that discussion, that inflationary pressures would likely mean an increase in cost of this work.*

*The District Council has incurred the same inflationary pressure and is having to manage its budgets and priorities accordingly. Town and Parish Councils are not obliged to use the contractors we have procured, it is merely an option that is available to them to help them benefit from the economies of scale. Equally there was the option, to procure their own alternative contracted solution.*

*The suggestion that it is somehow the District Council that has directly passed on cost to Towns and Parishes is factually incorrect, and I would be happy for our senior officer team to bring Cllr Wade up to date on the facts, on the same basis upon which they have already been shared with the Chair and Clerk of the Parish Council to which I suspect he refers.*

*Note – in response to a supplementary question regarding encouraging partnership working between the District Council and Towns and Parishes and seeking assurance that the contract was not to the benefit of the District Council only, the Portfolio Holder felt there had been a clear demonstration of joint working with the Town and Parish Councils in relation to the contract, where the District Council had been able to offer the lowest price possible, due to economies of scale.*

## **Second Questions**

### **Question 5**

#### **From Cllr Alex Wade to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Cleary**

As NFDC celebrates its 50th year, and we are off the back of a General election where there seemed to be a lot of apathy and frustration, what efforts are being made to engage New Forest's Residents, to learn about what NFDC Does and become involved in the democratic process? And do you agree, that despite it not being unique to the New Forest, the voter turnout for local elections suggests there is more we can do?

*Answer:*

*Members will be aware that as part of this Council's 50 year milestone, we have brought together 50 facts, using each of the numbers one to fifty, to illustrate the breadth of activity we are involved in. A really creative and informative piece of work to engage and inform our residents in what this Council does. On the NFDC website, many of the facts within the list are accompanied by a link to find out more, and signpost residents to services and support.*

*A 50 years of NFDC video, alongside an audio clip narrated by me, as Leader, gives a snapshot of some of those important aspects of local life we are involved in, and which could be of real benefit to our residents. The 50 list will also feature at our stand at this year's New Forest Show.*

*Members may also be aware that to mark our 50 years, a local sculptor is carving a commemorative design into the cedar tree stump at Appletree Court, a tree which was felled in 2023 due to safety concerns with the root structure. The design will be a visual representation of our work to support our district, both over the last 50 years and into the future. The remaining logs are also being carved into decorative seating for staff and visitors.*

*Becoming involved in the democratic process and encouraging local people to vote is something we can all play our part in promoting. The Council does promote campaigns such as the “become a councillor” and “be a councillor” campaigns run by the National Association of Local Councils, and the Local Government Association, respectively. Our key communications channels, including social media, our residents emails, and work with local media outlets, also play an important part in encouraging people to vote with informative and engaging content throughout the period leading up to an election.*

*Note - in response to a supplementary question regarding engagement with local schools and colleges to encourage involvement in the democratic process, the Leader reported she would look into this and get back to Cllr Wade directly.*